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TRAINING FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

HARNESSING THE POWER OF COMMUNITY GROUPS

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Abstract – Farmer groups can play an important role in delivering effective agricultural training. They provide a structure that enables smallholders to learn from one another, and which allows technologies to be more readily adapted and successful adaptations shared. There is research that supports the value of groups in helping small producers gain technical knowledge (Spielman et al, 2008), build small enterprises (Kodithuwakku & Rosa, 2002), and develop management capabilities (Rouse, 2006). This is especially important for women smallholders, who frequently lack access to relevant information about new products and processes, and whose productivity is often constrained by a lack of relevant skills (Danida, 2004).

Optimism around the potential of women's groups to enhance the delivery agricultural extension programmes and empower women smallholders glosses over the complexities of social capital in farmer groups, however, and ignores certain potentially negative effects of social capital on women: Social relationships in groups may be strained by using the group to deliver training, groups may exclude poorer members of the community, and powerful norms and networks operating at every level from the home to the broader society may limit the ability of women to benefit from groups, and of groups to create empowering change (Mayoux, 2001; Johnson, 2005).

If group-based extension programmes are to work, they must develop practical ways of taking these issues into account. This paper looks at how training can support the effectiveness of women's groups in agriculture, drawing on four case study projects, two in India and two in Ghana.

Key words: women, smallholders, self-help groups, agriculture, training

Mot clés: Les groupes marginalisés, l'habilitation des femmes, la formation agricole

1. INTRODUCTION

Women now make up the majority of the agricultural sector in developing countries. They are also particularly vulnerable to environmental changes (Aguilar, 2009). In the face of changing and increasingly erratic agricultural conditions, there is a huge premium on women's ability to respond innovatively and to be adaptable, in order to ensure food security and the productivity of the agricultural sector. Women farmers therefore have a particular need for agricultural extension services designed to help them acquire the skills and resources to adopt new production methods and manage change.

The needs of women smallholders in developing countries have historically been neglected by those providing extension services (e.g. Udry et al, 1995). In the past 15 years, the development literature has

presented strong evidence that this failure to address women's extension needs has been inefficient and has constrained agricultural growth (Udry et al, 1995; World Bank & IBRD, 2009). The need to improve the quantity and quality of extension services directed towards women smallholders, however, occurs within the context of limited agricultural extension budgets. This has meant that innovative methods to improve the reach and efficacy of extension services have been of great interest to organisations working in rural development.

The use of community structures such as farmer groups both for training and to help smallholders use newly acquired skills is one such method. There has been an increasing realisation that these groups have the potential to provide a forum for the exchange of knowledge, mutual support and the articulation of common needs, and, more broadly, that they represent a resource on which rural communities, and women in particular, can draw in order to overcome some of the challenges that they face (Leach et al, 2000; Rouse, 2006; Swain & Vargese, 2009). Over the past two decades, farmer groups have become a focus of many training programmes in rural areas (both government and NGO-led), and they take many forms, including farmer field schools, co-operatives and self-help groups.

The literature on social capital has been widely used to explain the potential contribution of groups to rural development strategies. This literature recognises that networks of social relationships and norms of behaviour such as honesty or mutual aid, are a source of value to individuals, communities and societies, alongside their physical and human capital (Coleman, 1988; Portes, 1998). From the social capital perspective, it is the networks of linkages between farmers, and the norms these networks foster, which make groups capable of supporting agricultural extension in the ways mentioned above.

Several authors have, however, cautioned that the optimism around the potential of social capital to enhance the delivery agricultural extension programmes and empower their women smallholder beneficiaries glosses over the complex functioning of social capital in community groups, and ignores certain potentially negative effects of social capital on women. Specifically, the nature of the social capital within groups may mean that the different functions that have been attributed to groups (such as providing mutual insurance and facilitating access to credit) may conflict with one another (Bernard & Spielman, 2009), and networks and norms can disadvantage women, through exclusion from certain valuable networks or through restrictive norms (Mayoux, 2001, Johnson, 2005).

Although the social capital within groups is an important resource for maximising the effectiveness of agricultural extension for women, these emerging concerns about the limitations of social capital within women's groups have serious implications for the ability of groups to act as an effective way of delivering agricultural extension, and to address existing social and gender disadvantages. This paper argues that training can play an important role in enabling groups to overcome some of these limitations. It presents evidence from case studies of four organisations that deliver agricultural extension, two in India and two in Ghana, on how training can support intra-group relationships and functioning. It also looks at how training can engage the support wider community, so that groups can be used successfully to deliver agricultural training to women smallholders and support the adoption of innovative agricultural practices.

2. SOCIAL CAPITAL IN AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION

The paper accepts the central insight of the developing social capital literature, namely that social relations provide a variety of resources for both individuals and groups, and that these resources are a function of the structure of the social relations within which an actor is located (Adler & Kwon, 2002:18). It distinguishes between different types of social relationships, defining strong ties as relationships which are intensive in time and attention, and are likely to be found in close-knit networks (including self-help groups, farmer field schools or saving and credit groups), where individuals all know most of the other individuals in the network (Woolcock, 2001:71-72). Weaker ties are more likely to span different groups. Gittel and Vidal (cited in Woolcock (2001) refer to ties which join different social groups as 'bridging' ties.

These reciprocal relationships, or ties, generate externalities, or added benefits, which can broadly be categorised as informational externalities, norms, and trust externalities (Coleman, 1988). These externalities are available to others in their networks and potentially yield benefits to individuals within the group, the group itself, or both. For example, individuals within a group may have access to information regarding market prices as a by-product of their participation in a social group, or close relationships might lead to strong norms of honesty within a group, reducing the transaction costs of doing business for all members of that community.

These externalities can be very valuable in the context of agricultural extension, and they are particularly valuable for women. In terms of informational externalities, there is evidence that close ties facilitate the acquisition and retention of extension information. Research on farmer field schools indicates that delivering training within the context of groups enables smallholders to learn from one another, which allows technologies to be more readily adapted, and successful adaptations to be shared (Röling & van der Fliert, 1994). This seems true for group structures more broadly. A review of FAO projects found that: 'small producers share information, acquire knowledge and develop enterprise management and organisational skills more quickly in small "trust" groups than in larger ones.' (Rouse, 2006:20). Spielman, Davis, Negash & Avele (2008) echo the importance of group learning in assisting smallholder innovation. Their findings from Ethiopia highlighted smallholder innovation networks such as groups, as key to the development of agriculture, partly because they improved access to relevant knowledge.

For women, groups are particularly important in facilitating access to information, and in providing support in implementing new skills, as agricultural knowledge is not necessarily transferred from men who receive training to the women in their households (Rivera & Corning, 1990; Saito, 1994; World Bank & IBRD, 2009). It is also now widely accepted that the difficulties that women have in accessing networks has contributed to a lack of self-employment opportunities (e.g. Stevenson & St-Onge, 2005). Although these difficulties have complex causes, there is evidence that when projects have facilitated the development of networks which specifically focused on women's needs, they have helped women build businesses (see Leach et al, 2000).

The trust and norms of mutual accountability fostered by close networks of strong relationship, such as those found in groups, have also been used successfully to facilitate access to credit. This is vital to overcoming the capital constraints that prevent farmers adopting new techniques. On a small scale, savings groups where members save together and take it in turns to receive a revolving loan provide a capital injection for farmers which can be used to invest in technology or inputs to support new production methods. Microfinance programmes commonly aim to enable large numbers of poor clients to access loans under conditions that are sufficiently attractive to lenders, so that the service is sustainable. The premise is that collectively, groups are more likely to make consistent repayments because individuals within the group are less likely to default on their repayments when their peers are liable for the debt, because group members can be monitored by the group, and because norms of reciprocity within groups mean that other members may cover the repayments of individuals who are temporarily unable to meet their repayment obligations. As the risk of default is lower, the loans can be advanced to individuals who would not be an acceptable risk on their own. In this way, groups are able to use their relationships as a resource to secure capital loans on better terms. In Mayoux's (2001) words, '[t]he existence of social capital in the form of indigenous networks and norms of association is seen as substituting for financial collateral in the selection of loan beneficiaries and loan disbursement and recovery.'

For women, this is an important swap, as they tend to have less access to capital to invest in new techniques or new ventures, and are less likely to own land, which could be used as collateral for loans (World Bank & IBRD, 2009). In many places, there are also cultural perceptions that women are bad debtors, despite several studies which show women repay loans more reliably than men (Hashemi, Schuler & Rile, 1996; Flintan, 2007). The ability to use the social capital within groups to increase their access to credit can therefore help women overcome a major obstacle to the implementation of new production methods.

The primary form of social capital within groups arises from strong intra-group ties. The formation of groups can nevertheless also facilitate the establishment of bridging ties with training programmes and local governance structures by allowing women to establish a collective voice as smallholders, and giving them confidence to push for their needs to be met in terms of the training and resources required to improve production processes (Padmaja & Bantilan, 2005). Groups can give women an enhanced voice in their community in this way too (GTZ, 2003; Isubikalu, 2007). Strong group organisation at the grassroots level has been key to ensuring that women's needs were considered in planning processes at all levels in many extension projects (Koopman, 1997; Hagmann, Chuma, Murwira, Connolly & Ficarelli, 2002; Padmaja & Bantilan, 2005).

There is therefore evidence that groups can mobilise existing social capital and create new forms of social capital, which can potentially support women's access to the information and resources they require to implement innovative production methods. This makes it important for those delivering agricultural extension to understand properly how social capital works in farmer groups in order to make use of it effectively.

3. LIMITS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

Mayoux (2001) points out that there has been a tendency in development circles, and particularly in micro-finance, to focus on the potential of groups to set in motion a virtuous circle: participation in groups allows women to use their social capital to access more training and credit, enabling them to expand their productive activities. This increases their income and assets, and they become empowered within their families and communities, building new relationships and networks which strengthen their social capital. According to Mayoux (2001:439): '[s]ocial capital is therefore seen as simultaneously contributing to financial sustainability, poverty targeting and women's empowerment. The assumption underlying the paradigm is that social capital is inherently positive and beneficial and can be used by programmes without external intervention to build or increase it.'

The economic and social constraints that prevent women smallholders from accessing and applying training are complex, however, and frequently, group-based programmes do not take into account the dynamics within groups as they deal with changing roles and responsibilities. Nor do they adequately address the broader framework of community relationships and macro-level economic, legal, social and political institutions which affect the ability of women's groups to create changes in their situations (see Mayoux, 2001).

Three main concerns have been articulated in the literature. Firstly, it is often assumed that the social capital in groups which are established for the purposes of mutual assistance, and often friendship, can be used indefinitely to support extension or micro-enterprise programmes without damaging the original relationships. This assumption is often unjustified, and this has practical consequences for the sustainability of group-based programmes. Secondly, groups have the potential to exclude poorer members of the community, throwing their ability to target poverty into question. Finally, powerful norms and networks operating at every level from the home to the broader society often limit the ability of women to benefit from groups, and of groups to create empowering change (Mayoux, 2001; Johnson, 2005)

If group-based extension programmes are to work, they need to be aware of these issues and develop practical ways of taking them into account in their extension work. The four case studies which follow consist of two programmes in Ghana and two in India. These programmes have been relatively successful in engaging women in relevant and effective training through the use of groups, although they also experienced ongoing challenges. The projects were chosen after an in-depth analysis of 21 reviews of international projects which delivered training for rural women. They highlighted several strategies commonly used to address the issues mentioned above. The aim of the case studies was to

draw out practical ways in which these projects had used training to support the effectiveness of their groups, and help them deal with these challenges.

4. THE CASE STUDIES

The case study organisations operated in quite different contexts. Although both India and Ghana have a high proportion of women engaged in smallholder agriculture (World Bank, 2007), they faced different gender norms within families and communities, different systems of local government, and different availabilities of credit. There were nevertheless significant similarities in the way they used training to support the organisation and management of groups, to help groups accommodate more inclusive memberships without compromising effectiveness, and to enable groups to deal with restrictive social structures. These similarities are drawn out and discussed. The case study organisations were:

3.1.1. The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), Gujarat, India

SEWA is a registered trade union with a remit to 'organise women workers for full employment'. Through its integrated approach to employment and self-reliance, workers can obtain work, income, food and social security. The organisation now has 966,139 members across nine states in India, with the majority (519,309) living in Gujarat. Like all the interventions studied, SEWA has taken a self-help group (SHG) approach to women's empowerment. Interviews and group discussions were held with groups from the villages of Ganeshpura, Vasna Mota and Visavdi.

3.1.2. Kudumbashree, Kerala, India

Meaning 'family prosperity', Kudumbashree was set up by the Kerala State Poverty Eradication Mission (SPEM) in 1998 and now has five million members, covering more than half of the households in Kerala. Agriculture is just one focus for the Kudumbashree mission: their holistic approach attempts to address all aspects of the poverty cycle. Kudumbashree relies heavily on their village and district structure to identify and understand the women's needs. The field research was carried out with groups from the villages of Thirupuram, Perumkadavila, Kallior and Manikal.

3.1.3. Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA), Central Region, Ghana

MoFA is charged with implementing national agricultural extension policies and responding to regional agricultural priorities. Smallholders are a priority group for the Ministry. It provides technical agricultural training through a network of extension agents and the empowerment of women is an explicit goal. CSD visited three villages assisted by MoFA Central Region during the field work: Ekon (a fishing village on the outskirts of Cape Coast), Krofu and Bobikuma (both agricultural villages in the rural interior of the Central Region).

3.1.4. Africa 2000 Network (A2N), Greater Accra, Ghana

A2N was originally set up by the United Nations Development Programme to address environmental issues at community level, bringing agricultural issues to the fore. It begins any project by working with community members to identify their assets and using this exploration to develop ideas about how assets can be boosted and the 'leakage' of any assets minimised. Two villages were visited for the field work: Onyansana, a village on the outskirts of Accra, and Mamfe, a village in the more fertile interior of the Greater Accra Region.

5. FINDINGS

5. 1. How training can contribute to the development of social capital within groups

As groups expand the range and intensity of their activities, and especially as they become responsible for loan management, they make more demands on group members. For example, Mayoux's (2001) research into seven women's group-based programmes in Cameroon shows that increasingly strict accountability measures for groups created significant work for some volunteers, who then expected to receive benefits in return. Where this expectation was not managed, volunteers sometimes stopped co-operating in the group, and occasionally withheld their loan repayments. Where salaries were paid, this was frequently a source of tension within the groups, sometimes compromising the trust and goodwill on which the groups' success was supposed to be based. This challenges the assumption that social capital within groups can be used indefinitely within micro-finance and other groups without depleting it, and highlights the importance of targeted interventions to develop new kinds of social capital to ensure that groups can achieve their potential as a venue for training and savings.

Many development projects have been unsuccessful because they required more group management skills than the groups had, and these needed to be developed over time if the group was to realise the benefits of cooperation. Bernard et al (2007) emphasise the importance of building management structures and supporting the development of new forms of relationship and norms within groups. They found that the management capacity of groups constrained their ability to deliver benefits to their groups, even where they were governed by sets of formal rules and procedures. Extension training does not automatically foster the networks of useful relationships that allow groups to support their members and improve their ability to access services (Johnson, Lilja, Ashby & Garcia, 2004). Rather, new organisations need specific group management training and sustained support to survive in the long term (Johnson, Lilja, Ashby & Garcia, 2004; Bingen et al, 2003, Joy, Prema & Krishnan, 2008). In other words, while groups provide a valuable forum for training, they require additional training and support to function optimally (Stringfellow, Coulter, Lucey, McKone & Hussain, 1997).

The case studies indicate that there are several specific ways in which groups can be supported. Firstly, facilitating opportunities for groups to learn from each other, share ideas and take concerted action can improve groups' effectiveness. This was been found in several project reviews (e.g. Chaturvedi & Gray, 2001). Each of the case study organisations relied on group members who received training to communicate the content of the training to those who did not receive training, in order to reach more women in a target community. None of the case study projects assumed that effective information sharing would automatically happen in the groups, however. Instead, they introduced measures to facilitate the process.

A2N, for example, discussed the 'how' of reporting as part of the training. At the end of the training, the women who received the training rehearsed what they would tell the group. Role plays with the trainers helped them remember the information and convey it to the group. The trainers also suggested that the women share the information immediately when they got back from training, before they forgot it. According to the A2N director, the time spent on developing peer learning was an important part of creating a sustainable group. They found that they needed to provide support for this aspect only until the group had sufficient experience to create a 'group memory', which could help them solve new problems on their own.

One MOFA manager explained that the transfer of information depends very much on how cohesive the group was, and how committed it was to common goals. Where the groups were cohesive, they experienced few problems sharing individual training through demonstrations. Where groups were less cohesive, however, they found that group leaders needed financial incentives at the local level to share their training. As the manager put it:

When the groups are formed for the wrong reasons, it is difficult to fix the problem, as self-interest is the main driver.

Manager, MoFA Cape Coast

Secondly, directly training women in group organisation techniques can enable groups to function effectively, and complement technical training in both agriculture and enterprise skills (Koopman, 1997; Chaturvedi & Gray, 2001; Barwa, 2003; Johnson et al, 2004).

The case studies found that organisational training greatly improved the operation of the groups, and enabled them to make better use of their resources. Training in group management processes, such as establishing group regulations, leadership structures, and decision-making procedures, improved accountability within the group and reduced the potential for conflict between the executive and other members.

We were taught about by-laws & regulations – now we are able to know the true members, and have [a] way of removing difficult members. Individual from Ogbe, A2N

During training, these groups are taught leadership skills, and encouraged to write their own by-laws to regulate group membership. Offenders are fined. This is working well. Groups that go through this training are less likely to break down than those that have not. The effects of the training are also visible in the books, minutes and attendance records of the groups, which are more complete, accurate and up to date than groups that have not had the training. Manager, MoFA

Finally, mechanisms for conflict resolution can help to prevent group breakdown and improve the sustainability of projects (IFAD, 2007). Both projects in Ghana found that training in how to discuss difficult topics with members and deal with challenging situations made the groups more stable and resilient, and therefore better able to achieve their goals over the long periods of time required. One project manager shared the following:

If groups are not trained in group dynamics, when they go through the conflict stage of group formation, they are not able to manage this. At this point, those with subversive attitudes cause conflict and those who have gone through this usually form new groups. Manager, MoFA Cape Coast

Group leaders in both India and Ghana reported that training in leadership skills made them more confident in running meetings, dealing with problems and keeping the record required for transparency:

I had leadership training; it used to be once a month and [is] now reduced so it is only rare. It covered how to control the group, accounting and how to manage balance sheets. There have been big improvements in being able to manage the meetings. I feel it has made me more confident but still I could improve. Individual from Perumkadavila, Kudumbashree

The primary research therefore strongly supports the idea that women's groups need training and support at various points in their development in order to function effectively, and to have a chance to become self-sufficient. They indicate that new kinds of social capital are necessary for groups to expand their function from basic mutual assistance to more complex production and credit groups, and that training which helps them build this social capital is an important complement to technical training and financial capacity building.

5.2. How training can allow groups to be more inclusive without compromising functionality

The close peer relationships in groups which enable them to function effectively for collective saving and credit and co-operative production may, by their nature, exclude the poor, and particularly poorer women (Mayoux, 2001). Bernard & Spielman (2009) find evidence of significant tradeoffs between marketing performance and inclusiveness in their study of agricultural marketing cooperatives in Ethiopia. Whether groups exclude the poor is currently debated in the literature (see Bennell, 1999; Cleaver, 2005). However, both social capital theory and much empirical work indicate that at some

point, extending membership more widely will be in tension with using intra-group relationships to ensure accountability and repayment, and that groups need to be able to manage this tension. This challenges the assumption that the social capital within groups automatically enables the poor to participate in rural development programmes.

Each of the case studies showed that groups can play an important role in helping poorer women attend training and subsequently implement training. Convincing smallholders who are typically risk averse and time poor to make changes in their practice is often difficult in the initial stages of a project. In many projects, often only a small number of better-off farmers, with the resources and capacity to risk making changes, are willing to adapt their practices (DFID, nd).

The case studies indicated that the close ties within groups enabled women to identify with peers engaged with the project, and showed that seeing the success of people to whom they related made a huge difference in the women's willingness to engage with project workers, and to take the initial risk of involvement. Women in each group in each project said that the success of others in the group, and their encouragement was their primary motivation for getting involved in the project initially:

I noticed how A2N was available to help the group, and I saw how the susu system [revolving credit] was helping women in the group. I was very impressed by the way group members cared for each other and helped each other to farm better. This made me very eager to join the group. I was encouraged by A2N to join the group not directly but indirectly through their visits and attitude. Individual from Odonkor, A2N

This method of engaging women was particularly important when it came to the poorest members of the community. As a trainer at Kudumbashree noted:

[Those below the poverty line] do not have the risk taking mindset. The primary objective has to be to turn them into entrepreneurs. Success stories are the best way of getting them involved, we tell them about this first and then they can see the benefits. Trainer, Kerala

The case study organisations in both India and Ghana focused on promoting norms of mutual assistance within the groups, and assistance rather than exclusion of the poorest was the dominant approach within the groups, as this group confirmed:

If there is someone that is desperate to join and destitute, we will give them the out-of-turn loan ... so [they] can begin the investment and then go from there. It is more likely that the destitute will be able to join [the group] and we all try and assist them. Group in Ganeshpura, SEWA

At the same time, both SEWA and Kudumbashree focused on sustainability and emphasised creating buy-in through group pressure and physical capital investment, and the groups would not let even the poorest have a free ride in terms of investment:

We [the group] assist the poorest to make the initial savings but we will only do this if they are willing to save. They just must save something and this is enough to start in the group. Group in Perumkadavila, Kudumbashree

The two projects in Ghana echoed the idea that, despite their potential for reaching the poor, groups needed to be able to control their membership. Senior managers at both MoFA and A2N pointed out that to achieve the level of cohesiveness and mutual trust that they need to work effectively, groups needed to be able to select members they could trust to contribute. This was challenging:

[T]he groups are not sufficiently selective of their members. It is not part of the culture to exclude those who wish to participate. But it is necessary for groups to be able to select their own members, because they need to work closely together and therefore need high levels of trust. Manager, MoFA, Cape Coast

Both MoFA and A2N found it important to provide training to help groups set membership rules that would make it possible to protect their membership. As the women were mutually accountable to each

other within the groups, they needed to retain control over the risk of admitting poorer members. This meant that groups were not necessarily suitable for addressing the needs of the absolutely destitute. The case studies nevertheless suggest that groups are able to involve poorer people than would otherwise participate in training programmes, and that management training which helped groups enforce rules actually enabled groups to manage the inclusion of poorer members by enabling them to use their strong social ties to encourage poorer women to make realistic changes, without compromising the norms of trust and mutual assistance within the group. Groups were thus able to help spread training more widely, rather than concentrating it among those who are already advantaged within the community, and to spread opportunities to engage in new production and enterprise practices far beyond the typical early adopters in communities.

5.3. How training can help groups form bridging ties

Groups operate within in a network of other social relationships, which may significantly affect the extent to which groups are able to act as a resource for women. Mayoux's (2001) concern that the strength of men's social capital in rural communities often blocks the potentially empowering effect of the social capital within women's groups is widely noted in project reviews (e.g. Koopman, 1997; Johnson et al, 2004). Male networks, and traditional social norms that preserve male dominance often limit women's access to community resources and markets. Middle men, for example, frequently prevent women from gaining access to fair prices and, even when they are able to make their voices heard by a male-dominated local government, women's needs may be given secondary importance (World Bank & IBRD, 2009). At a broader level, inheritance laws and rules about women's land ownership can also significantly effect women's opportunities to use training to increase their productivity. Within the home, social capital in the form of gender norms may result in women handing profits to their husbands, for example, limiting the empowering effect of the groups (Johnson, 2005). Mayoux (2001) suggests that these considerations challenge the assumption that the social capital within women's groups automatically leads to women's 'empowerment', and argues that critical gender questions need to be asked here about the horizontal and vertical relationships between women and men at the household, community and society levels.

Research has shown that the formation of groups can enable women to make their collective voice heard at a local government level, and to press for more appropriate training and better support services (GTZ, 2003; Isibikal, 2007). According to Hagmann et al, (2002), relevant training can maximise the impact of groups in this respect:

[S]trengthening collective capacity of local groups for self-organisation, collective action, negotiation of their own interests and conflict management, as well as their articulation and bargaining power vis-à-vis authorities, service providers, and policy makers ... has been an important success factor in agricultural extension projects.
(Hagmann et al, 2002).

The case studies indicate that while the formation of women's groups provides a way for women to articulate their needs, projects need to address the way that dominant networks and norms which exclude women shape women's ability to effect change, if they are to empower women to use new skills and build new businesses. In other words, while the close ties within groups can build confidence to challenge restrictive gender patterns, and training in lobbying, for instance, can increase their voice, this alone is insufficient to effect change. Projects also need to work to help groups change relationships within their families and communities, and build bridging ties to local government.

The importance of combining these two approaches can be seen by comparing the experiences of the Ghanaian and Indian organisations in creating change at the local government level. In Ghana, A2N provided groups with training in lobbying. One group successfully lobbied their local government for an improved school building for their children. Another group stated that the lobbying training had

increased their confidence and they believed it would help them when they approached the bank manager for a loan.

Although the groups had raised women's awareness of their needs, and raised their confidence to approach authorities to meet them, there was nevertheless still a strong perception in the Ghanaian groups that local government structures were unresponsive to them. The group at Onyasanaa felt that the local assembly was not, on the whole, responsive to their needs. Likewise, the MoFA group in Bobikuma had the perception that the local assembly was unlikely to help them, despite clearly understanding how to articulate their needs at this level. There are, therefore, limitations on the power of group formation and training in lobbying alone to effect change.

The experience of the Indian groups shows that training needs to be complemented by help to form relationships with the local government. Both projects in India had strong links with the local government systems (panchayats), and similar increases in confidence and lobbying skills yielded higher dividends. Often the project's initial interaction in the village was at the panchayat offices, and this gave both Kudumbashree and SEWA credibility with the villagers. Both SEWA and Kudumbashree initially assisted the women to air their grievances to the panchayat officials through a project worker or the chairperson, or through encouraging the group leaders to speak with them. Both case studies also attempted to enhance the role of the women within the panchayat, and throughout the fieldwork it was found that group leaders were now members of the (village level) gram panchayat.

The women continually highlighted the empowering nature of these interactions and the changes that this had initiated:

As [Community Development Society] chairperson, I have the responsibility for 20 wards and 250 [self-help groups]. I have to verify the information [from the groups] and give it to [the] district panchayat. If some enterprise is not working well I must inspire and motivate them. I also assist in the availability of credit from banks. Also I have to do status reports from all groups in panchayat. [I] learnt through [the] Kudumbashree mission all the skills needed to do [the] CDS role ... through leadership and administration training which covers all aspects. Individual from Manikal, Kudumbashree

Enhancing the confidence of the women was the key to initiating and maintaining change, but confidence building and training explicitly designed to enable women to articulate their needs at local government (or higher) level should be accompanied by formal links between groups for maximum effectiveness.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Social capital within groups, while valuable, has limitations which have often been ignored by projects which seek to use groups to help women acquire the training and resources they need to implement improved production practices. The social capital lens shows that if women's groups are to support innovation over the long term, they need to be able to manage their processes and membership, and develop external ties to community and local government structures which are often dominated by men. This paper has shown that by building new forms of social capital which support group functioning, training can increase the capacity of women's groups to deliver benefits to their members, and enable them to extend their membership without compromising their functionality. It has also shown that training can help groups use their close ties to build confidence, but must facilitate external ties which can women overcome traditional barriers to accessing the training and resources that they need.

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